

Dear Ms. O'Keefe,

I submit this letter to be considered for an interim seat on the Amherst School Committee. I ran in 2019 through the town-wide election, where I lost by a handful of votes, and then again in 2020 through a similar process to this one. I am once again seeking to serve because I care deeply about this District. I am concerned about the variety of impacts, among them the inevitable effects of the pandemic, that have greatly strained the District since I first ran four years ago. I strongly believe my presence on the Committee, while only limited, will help it return to its fully productive and positive potential.

My partner and I have lived in town since 2010, after moving to the area from Mali, West Africa where we served in the Peace Corps for two years. It was my PhD degree at UMass' College of Education that drew us to the area, and throughout the last decade our birth son and foster children have attended Crocker Farm preschool, the Head Start Program, and Fort River. For over a decade I served as a member of what was known in the past as the School Equity Task Force. This work, among other initiatives, has brought me to numerous school committee meetings each year. Most recently, during the 2022-2023 school year, I worked as a consultant at the High School as part of the Restorative Justice program. Together with the students, we explored Youth Participatory Action Research as a means to examine and address their identified issues of school culture and climate in the school. All this to say, I am highly invested, and committed to our school district and I want to be part of maintaining our District's mission: *the academic achievement of every student learning in a system dedicated to social justice and multiculturalism.*

My role as an active citizen in town affords me access to a varied group of constituents. I enjoy communicating with the public, sharing information, and seeking input and feedback. I recognize the varying experiences of our student body and do not shy away from the sometimes-difficult conversations that are necessary to ensure we perform according to our district's mission. The District's mission, after all, is very much a reason my partner and I commit to residing in town, but one that I fear is at risk if we do not center the voices of faculty, staff and students who are part of the larger, complex system. I want the best for our District, as this plays such an important role in our town's appeal, and I am committed to drawing on my experience to inform discussions and decisions, and represent constituents.

The perspective I offer is informed by my position as a parent of a sixth grader, my years as a 7th through 12th grade educator, my work as a teacher educator, my role as an educational researcher specializing in how inequities are perpetuated or challenged in public spaces - such as in school committee meetings, and my consulting experience in both domestic and international settings. I bring a student-centered approach to the School Committee, and wish to center the students as our "unit of analysis" in determining whether we are upholding the District's mission.

Equally important is my leadership experience in the nonprofit sector which well situates me to be part of the District budget process. In my professional work, I write grant proposals and develop budgets and collaborate with my colleagues, so I am very comfortable analyzing complex budgets. I understand the fiscal challenges facing both the Regional School District and the elementary District and will collaborate with committee members to find creative ways to fund the community's priorities.

If you are looking for someone with deep experience and knowledge of educational policy and practice, issues of equity, the ability to understand and appreciate differing beliefs and perspectives, as the above experiences show, I believe I am an excellent fit.

It would be an honor to serve the town of Amherst in this capacity, and I would both enjoy and appreciate working with the remaining two school committee members.

Respectfully submitted,

Katie Lazdowski